



HAL
open science

Strategies of Visibility and Invisibility: Rumanians and Moroccans in El Ejido, Spain

Swanie Potot

► **To cite this version:**

Swanie Potot. Strategies of Visibility and Invisibility: Rumanians and Moroccans in El Ejido, Spain. Jansen S. and Löfving S. Struggles for Home: Violence, Hope and the Movement of People., Berghahn Books, pp.109-128, 2008, Series Dislocations. halshs-00372749

HAL Id: halshs-00372749

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00372749>

Submitted on 2 Apr 2009

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Strategies of Visibility and Invisibility: Rumanians and Moroccans in El Ejido, Spain

Published in 2008 in: Jansen S. and Löfving S. (Eds), *Struggles for Home: Violence, Hope and the Movement of People* (Title unsure), Berghahn Books, Series Dislocations Chapter Five, pp.109-128
Swanie Potot

Introduction

The violence encountered by the migrants studied in this text is of several kinds: they were confronted with the 'structural violence' of poverty and economic crisis having in their countries of origin (Galtung 1969), and they are now facing racist violence in the place they have migrated to in order to work. Categorised not as refugees but as economic migrants, they do not benefit from any sort of international protection regime.

The analysis shall focus on the Almeria province of Andalusia, in the South of Spain, where large numbers of foreign workers from various origins are employed in agriculture. In this region, massive exploitation of cheap and reliable manpower, together with strong competition for jobs between workers, have led to severe interethnic tensions. During the year 2000, these tensions escalated into riots directed mainly against Moroccan workers, causing dozens of people to be injured as they were chased down the streets of the agricultural centre of El Ejido. Since then, Moroccans workers, who for decades have been the main group of foreigners working in the area, are being steadily replaced by other migrants, among whom Rumanians are estimated to be the most numerous.

This essay explores the social relations shaped by such contestations in the context of labour migration. Agriculture is the most important economic activity in the area and the entire social life of the Almeria region seems to revolve around this sector. The sharp rise in economic productivity of the area has been the work of persons from a variety of backgrounds: Spaniards coming from other regions, Moroccans, who have been immigrating here for decades, Rumanians, relative newcomers and very much subdued, and others. But this collective activity has not given rise to solidarities or collective feelings amongst those workers. On the contrary, the pragmatics of the context have been articulated into an atmosphere of social distance and conflict, in which the various groups are in search not only of economic promotion but also of social recognition.

Xenophobia plays a key role here. While Spaniards tend to deploy it as a strategic dimension of their human resources management, Moroccans attempt to resist it in order to regain a sense of dignity, whereas Rumanians negotiate their identity as whites, intending to gain social recognition by inscribing themselves into Spanish racism. This chapter analyses such complexities of racism and their link with territory. A comparison of Moroccan and Rumanian migrants' attitudes will underline that relations to space, composed through the history and resources of those groups, strongly condition their dealings with social exclusion. This will lead us to investigate how personal and collective histories, meanings and objectives of migration, as well as social, juridical and political contexts in places of arrival, play a role in the process of attachment to territory and the collective representations of immigrant workers.

The analysis will proceed in four steps. A first step will shed a light on the social and economic context which led various populations to come to work in the area. It will show how a social scale has been built parallel to the growth of the region, placing different groups on ranking levels. A second part will explore the sources of increasing racism toward Moroccans during the last decade and their collective responses to it. A third section will deal with the recent arrival of

Rumanians, considered highly desirable by many Spaniards, and their development of a very different relationship to space. The conclusion intends to explain the absence of solidarity based on class consciousness between farm labourers and the overwhelming weight attributed to origin in their self-identification.

The Colonisation of Almeria Province

Fifty years ago, the Campo de Dalías, as the region of El Ejido was formerly called, was just a windy, salty desert. As the region was the poorest part of Spain, its inhabitants would emigrate in large numbers to other European countries. The subsequent development of the area relied on a strong colonisation policy. This policy was very efficient, as, today, the area has become the richest in Spain, with the highest net domestic product per person (Checa 1999).

The colonisation of the area goes back to the 1950s. Under the tutelage of the ministry of agriculture, wells were dug to make the lands arable. The government then allocated small lots to modest families, promoting familial enterprises. The aim of this policy was to stop emigration by making it possible for people to develop economic enterprise in Spain. This policy resulted in the first wave of immigration into the province: in the course of two decades, hundreds of Spaniards from close or distant provinces came as colonists, attempting to make their fortune in the farming sector. The first greenhouses appeared in the 1960s, but it was only ten years later that this kind of cultivation became dominant. According to official data, in 1963 only half a hectare of greenhouses had been erected, while in 1984 they covered fourteen thousand hectares, including more than twelve thousand developed with government support. Financial assistance, via banks and state grants, allowed rapid access to property and agricultural equipment. The products resulting from these plantations--fruit and vegetable harvests--were sold to an increasingly vast region. Profits for small farmers were huge, and the region became known as the Green El Dorado. The economic growth of the area continued to be supported by the integration of Spain into the European Economic Community. Considered by the ECC, and later the European Union, as a disadvantaged zone to be integrated with priority, Andalusia benefited fully from European subsidies during the last twenty years.

But by the early 1980s, this expansion was confronted with an environmental problem, since all the water used in the greenhouses comes from underground. With time, this water had been polluted by chemical products and became far less abundant. For this reason, in 1984 the government decided to stop the colonisation process (law 117/1984), putting an end to the grants and no longer selling land.

This decision marks the beginning of the development of a new illegal economy in the province. Despite the law, greenhouses continued to be built, and wells irrigate more and more land. By the end of the century, the number of greenhouses was twice what it had been in 1984, nearly thirty thousand hectares (Checa 1999). Since the mid 1980s, all agricultural development in the province has been completely outside any legal control, and new farmers remain very eager. Meanwhile, farms have been restructured: intensive exploitation has slowly replaced small-scale operations, which have often gathered into cooperatives. Subsequently, rising demand from European markets, coinciding with improvements in transport, has promoted exports, which have become the most important mode of trade for Andalusian fruits and vegetables. These changing conditions led to the recruitment of a new kind of labour force. Until the 1980s, workers were mostly family members, but with intensive agriculture the need arose for casual workers, very flexible and poorly paid, in order to maximise profits from intensive production. Initially most casual workers were unemployed people from the area or nearby provinces. But economic difficulties encountered by

farmers, in contrast to overall economic growth in Spain, reduced the available reserve of Spanish workers willing to work in poor conditions, and landowners were enticed to exploit another type of labour. This led to the second wave of migration, dominated by foreign, low-skilled workers, coming mostly from North Africa, who could be paid low wages and managed in a very flexible way. This turning point occurred in the mid 1980s, when the model of the small family farm was overtaken by a more industrial mode of production.

Contributing to this process is the fact that for the last twenty years Spanish farmers have had to compete on the European market with other agricultural regions in South Mediterranean countries that enjoy climatic conditions as good as Andalusia's while labour is much cheaper. In this context, and confronted with the hegemony of a few large supermarket companies that bargain harshly on every transaction, product prices have systematically decreased while demand has steadily increased. Until the 1990s, Spain coped with this situation thanks to market protection and financial support from the European Union, but with the progressive withdrawal of import quotas imposed on non-EU members, competition is becoming very effective. Moreover, the type of sales has changed: nowadays farmers have to respond to very fluctuating demands from supermarkets all over Europe, and the harvesting of produce is done almost on real-time, following requests by supermarkets for delivery in the freshest possible state.

In such a context, massive exploitation of cheap labour has become essential to keep the sector running, and it is clear that foreign workers have been playing a central role in the process of modernisation of Andalusian agriculture. Today, even more than it was ten years ago, it is essential for the farmers to have, on the spot, a readily available reserve of workers who can be used and dismissed according to the unpredictable variations of activity. In this schema, the origins and statuses of foreign workers have become strongly diversified: South Americans, Filipinos, Africans and Eastern Europeans are now often hired alongside Moroccans. That is the main characteristic of the third period of immigration in the province. Job conditions are very hard: in the greenhouses the temperature is often well above 45°C, and workers frequently handle very dangerous toxic products. Every year some of them are contaminated, sometimes fatally, while they are processing vegetables (European Civic Forum 2004). But despite all these downsides, the area is still a very attractive place for people from poorer countries who seek to work in Western Europe. This third phase is also marked by the structural role played by undocumented workers. As they do not have the benefit of any protection concerning wages and dismissals, they provide to some extent the flexibility required by the farming companies (Berlan 1986). This exploitation is possible because these people are, by necessity, devoted entirely to agriculture. As Dan, one of my Rumanian informants, explained:

Here, if you don't have legal documents, you have no choice but to work in greenhouses. In the construction sector, employers want you to be covered by insurance; there are many accidents, so they don't want any problem. They want you to be insured, but if you are undocumented you can't get insurance. In greenhouses, what can happen to you? There is little chance you hurt yourself with tomatoes, is there? And actually, we are so many foreigners here, they don't need undocumented ones, they leave us in the greenhouses while they employ those who manage to get papers. (Dan, interview, 19 August 2000, translated from Rumanian)

Though some documented migrants leave the province to find better jobs in the north

or in the Madrid area, and a small proportion of undocumented migrants get repatriated by the authorities, the arrival of hundreds of new migrants all year long maintains the reserve of workers at a high level. Only legal migrants obtain permanent or, more often, longer-term contracts (for a few months); most undocumented foreigners are casual workers hired on a daily basis. If they have no friends who are more settled in the area and who can help them find an occasional job, they go, every morning, to a 'job-market square' where they offer their labour to potential employers. During high season--January and February, and September to November--nearly all of them find some work; but during low season, many remain unemployed. For example, during the research, Dan--quoted above--was sharing a flat with five other Rumanians, two women (a mother and daughter) and three men, of whom only the two women, who had been in the area for two years, were actually working. August being in the middle of the low season, the others were out of work. The three young men spent their time wandering, hoping for an improbable opportunity to work while waiting for the resumption of the agricultural activity in September. As they had nothing to do during this period, they would go to the beach for hours, this activity being free. This situation of temporary unemployment in the black job-market is a point of tension between migrants, since it puts them in competition for jobs, while, as we shall see, the divisions and competitions between workers of different origins contribute to the implicit management of this special kind of labour power.

Political Tensions and Racist Violence

In this context of large-scale legal and illegal immigration, racism is part of everyday life, especially towards people from the Maghreb and Black Africans. In February 2000, racial tensions exploded into three days of riots against Moroccan workers after a mentally ill young Moroccan killed a Spanish girl. Following these exactions, Moroccan workers went on general strike. Then, large numbers of workers from Eastern European countries arrived who, so was it argued by journalists, had come especially to take the place of the striking Moroccan workers (*El País* 10 Feb. 2000; *Le Monde* 13 Feb. 2000). A deeper analysis of the situation, however, shows that coexistence of these populations dates back to a time before these events. Rumanian workers were being hired frequently in Spanish greenhouses since the mid 1990s. It was thus the increasing social and economic tensions of the sector that brought the presence of Rumanians to light. This process is of great interest, for, with no fundamental change, the strained situation to which it led made it possible to observe clearly the different ways in which the various populations related to territory, as we shall see below.

The events of February 2000 were not the first violent expressions of racism against Moroccans in the area. Two years previously, in February 1998, two workers from the Maghreb were burnt to death in their shelter. A few months later, a foreign farm worker was executed at night by a masked commando. In both cases, the matter was closed with no proceedings; police in the area are not prone to prosecuting Spaniards in cases of racist attacks.

The racist riots in February 2000 were indeed the consequence of a violent racist climate, endemic in the area, but their outbreak and the popular aspect they took on at that particular moment can be explained by related circumstances that, for several months, inflamed the situation. Two parallel processes aggravated tensions between Spanish bosses and Moroccan workers. The first is rooted in the economic quarrel between Spanish and Moroccan farmers. The second concerns the political climate during the months preceding the March 2000 elections. Let us look at both in turn.

The fruit, vegetable and fishing sectors are often sources of clashes between the Spanish and Moroccan governments. For many years, traditional modes of production did not allow Moroccans and other South Mediterranean farmers to compete with Spanish producers, but nowadays, more and more farms use modern equipment. Across the Strait of Gibraltar, Spanish farmers fear that the Moroccan trade will supplant the hegemonic position of Spain on the European market. Moreover, some huge food-processing companies have started relocating their plants to Morocco. Up to the present, import quotas of Moroccan products to the European Union are regularly determined by the European Commission after negotiations with Morocco, and each year custom rates are lowered for those quotas. Yet import into Europe is not controlled, or is badly controlled, and Spanish farmers regularly complain that Moroccan quotas are illegally exceeded, thus reducing their own opportunities to export to the rest of the European Union. Furthermore, an agreement signed in 1995 between the European Union and Morocco aims at creating, in 2012 or thereabouts, a free trade zone within the framework of a Euro-Mediterranean partnership. In that event, Spanish and Moroccan products would be in direct competition on the European market. Spanish farmers denounced this agreement, for according to them it endangers their own future. In Andalusia, and more specifically in the region of Almeria where most producers of fruit and vegetables for export are located, the fear of 'unfair' competition thus heightened feelings against Moroccans. Farmers' unions complained of the government's deserting them:

Farmers in Almeria are being sacrificed to globalisation. The importation of tomatoes from Morocco is increasing, and in return, Spanish multinational companies have access to the [Moroccan] communications market, and an agreement with Spanish fishermen is being negotiated. (Extract from interview with representatives from the COAG of Almeria quoted by FCE 2004: 48, author's translation)

In El Ejido, tensions created by this situation were aggravated when, in January 2000, the Confederation of Farmers' and Breeders' Trade Unions (COAG) denounced the Moroccan export of tomatoes, which exceeded thirty thousand metric tons. In the same month, the system of import certificates installed during the previous year, and requested by Spanish farmers, was abolished, as demanded by the Moroccan authorities. In reaction, on 25 January, one thousand five hundred farmers demonstrated their anger and blocked the ports of Algeciras and Cadiz. A series of violent acts against Moroccan fruit and vegetable haulers on Spanish territory followed: lorries were burnt, cargoes ruined, drivers manhandled. In Andalusia, Moroccans, be they lorry drivers or farm workers, were subjected to increasing animosity.

The situation became ever more strained since the farmers' protests found an echo among political parties now campaigning for the March 2000 legislative elections--all the more so since the electoral campaign focussed attention on the new immigration law. During debates about law 4/2000, finally voted on 22 December 1999, farmers from El Ejido area closed ranks. The proposed law had a particular progressive aspect that could not satisfy the position of the Andalusian farmers. Its aim was to give some rights to illegal immigrants, and it included a plan, for the following years, to reduce the number of undocumented migrants by increasing the number of regularisations and making procedures automatic after a two-year presence on Spanish territory. Above all, this law sought to penalise employers that hired foreign workers illegally, which in the Almeria area meant condemning the whole economic life of the region. In the months after it passed, farmers' unions joined

forces in a national debate on a scale far beyond themselves, in order to radically amend the bill submitted by minister M. Pimentel. In Andalusia, the argument reinforced resentment against Moroccan workers, who were held partially responsible for the advancement of the new law, insofar as, thanks to the Forum for the Integration of Immigrants, several associations defending immigrants' rights made their claims loud and clear.

Although the law passed, the subject remained at the core of the national debate because of the elections scheduled for March 2000. The Popular Party, which itself had created the law, promised to review it if it were re-elected. The question of immigration thus became a primary theme of the campaign. Detractors of the law and xenophobic candidates ceaselessly pointed out the damaging effects of immigration and denounced problems caused by immigrants. Such rhetoric was particularly prominent in the Almeria region, where racism had already been obvious before this argument. Law 4/2000 was scheduled to come into effect on 1 February 2000; the next day, all foreigners present since 1999 would be able to start a regularisation procedure. Anti-immigration voices exceeded all predictions: they expressed the fear that the country would be rapidly invaded by immigrants who, strengthened by the new law, would not behave in accord with their 'proper' status in Spanish society anymore. Many of the media took over this point of view, stating, with pictures to prove it, that an increasing number of *pateras* from the Maghreb were arriving on the Spanish coast. Again, this mainly concerned southern regions of Spain, and some voices lashed farmers who hired illegal workers and thus generated a perpetual appeal for new immigrants. In the Almeria region, the farmers' reaction consisted in demanding that immigrants behave with greater social discretion; they chased them away from public places and attacked immigrants' associations.

It is in this context of increasing racism that we must understand the riots in El Ejido. External circumstances stimulated anti-Moroccan feelings and established a climate filled with the potential for extreme violence. The smallest event was then enough to catalyse this and allow hatred of 'Moors' to erupt into violence. On 22 January a Moroccan worker killed two Spanish neighbours during a quarrel. During the following days, the town council, whose mayor, J. Encisco, is well known for his xenophobic position, organised a demonstration calling for 'justice to be dispensed'. This event, which seemed pacifist, was used as a means of expression by racist groups. Still, things might have ended there, if a second event had not happened some days later. A young Moroccan, later declared to be a mentally disturbed person, killed a Spanish woman in El Ejido. That triggered the riots: in the course of the next three days, racist rioters sacked the city and set upon Moroccan workers. Tension decreased only when five hundred policemen intervened and journalists arrived, bringing the situation to the attention of the rest of the world. Ultimately, about sixty Moroccans were injured and twenty-two persons arrested, eleven on each side of the dividing line.

In reaction, on 7 February, Moroccan farm workers launched a strike for an undetermined period of time. This collective action had clear, concrete demands (improved living conditions, a guarantee of minimal rights) and aimed at creating a social existence for immigrants in the region. Still, this was not a general strike, as all non-Moroccan foreign workers continued their labour in the greenhouses. Hence, their shared predicament did not erase the ethnic split; rather, the opposite occurred.

Relations to Space

Though the acts of violence against Moroccans may be explained by the context outlined above, it does not help us understand the lack of solidarity among foreign

workers in the area and the unwillingness of other workers, especially Rumanians, to join the demonstrations. I suggest that this atmosphere of division was due to the history and social position of the different migrant groups in this place. Because they arrived under dissimilar conditions and are in different stages of their migratory process, 'old' and 'new' arrivals have not developed same links to territory.

Moroccans--'Old' Migrants in a Process of Local Integration

Moroccans, geographically in close proximity and economically disadvantaged, were the first to benefit from the opportunity to work in Spain. Most of the early arrivals were men from the countryside who were sent abroad by their families to give their community the possibility to stay put (Checa 1994). Their plan was to work temporarily in Spain, even if conditions were harsh, spending as little as possible on living expenses so as to send most of their income home, which at this point in time was clearly identified as being in the country of origin. But for this first generation, most of the time, this precarious situation lasted much longer than anticipated, and permanent returns were actually quite rare. So they began to share their life between two places: the symbolic aspects of home remained in Morocco, where their migration helped them gain social consideration, but their continual presence in Andalusia, though regularly interrupted by long holidays at home, drove them to develop social relations there and, gradually, to settle in Spain. During the 1990s, we began to see, in the streets of El Ejido, some 'Arabic' coffee shops and a few Muslim butcher shops. And, whereas at the beginning of the 1980s most workers lived in slum conditions in the countryside, often using the *cortijos*--shelters in which tools are usually stored--as accommodation, by the end of the 1990s some streets in El Ejido town were known as Moroccan neighbourhoods. Some Moroccan workers still live in *cortijos*, but many have followed the same experience as Hamid:

When I arrived for the first time, in 1992, I stayed in the greenhouses--anywhere, where I could, I had no place to go. Then, after maybe two weeks, I went to Farid's *cortijo*, a cousin of mine, we used to work for the same boss and we lived in his *cortijo*, far away from here, near Balerma. Then, when I came back in 1995, I joined his [Kamel's] flat: his roommates had left and he couldn't pay for it on his own, so he asked us, me and my friend. We said yes, because it was nicer, it's a good flat and we are in town, it's better than in the countryside. Me, I couldn't rent a flat, because I didn't have legal papers, but Kamel [who had been regularised in Spain] had papers for the flat in his name, so we pay him and he deals with the owner. So, we live here, in this building [in El Ejido], we are four in the flat, there is also a young boy, seventeen, who arrived two months ago. He's Kamel's nephew. (Interview in an El Ejido street, 20 August 2000)

Connections across the Mediterranean Sea increased steadily during the last twenty years and places grew closer. Links have been tightened between the province of Almeria and some Moroccan villages, which have sometimes sent nearly all their able-bodied males across the Strait of Gibraltar. Every inhabitant of these villages has heard of Andalusia, and most of them have some friends or relatives there. They also often possess some electrical appliances or clothes purchased in Europe. All of them have stories about Almeria, and even if they have never been there, they can easily imagine how it is. For decades, Spanish agriculture has been regarded as a chance to make money that would be impossible to earn in Morocco. So even though the place has always been difficult to get to (Spain, being an EU member, imposes a strict visa regime on Morocco), many young Moroccans have long considered the south of Spain as part of their personal space: it is a place where they have links and where they can

plan to go sometime in the future. In this sense, we can say that these migrants constructed a 'transnational space', as Portes defines it (Portes 1996): strongly connected places joined by a multiplicity of links.

This closeness and the hopes it allows had an impact, with time, on the migratory project itself. The migrant model of a family emissary evolved into something more individualistic: instead of being sent by their kin, young people started to leave of their own will, seeking a better life in a richer country.² Thus nowadays many Moroccans who reach the Andalusian coast have emigrated with personal motives, not knowing when they will be able to go back and with the hope of obtaining, in time, the opportunity to stay legally in Spain. When they do, they often invite their wives to join them in Spain, making their family life in that country. In their memory, and even in their vocabulary, Morocco remains their home country, but their everyday life is clearly developing in Spain. The way they manage their earnings is significant: when a couple is reunited in Spain, less than one-third of their wages are sent back home, while the situation is the inverse when a migrant is single (Checa 1994).

This new situation changes the way these migrants consider their place in the Spanish area. As the idea of permanent return fades away or is seriously delayed, their presence, not only as workers, but also as full persons, becomes a critical point. They no longer consider their stay as a temporary situation of hardship compensated for by the benefits gained in the home country. Social considerations are henceforth a matter that has importance in the area of immigration itself. Progressively, they seek not only better working conditions but also more respect from the local population. This is a major issue with Spaniards: having been confronted with racism for years, Moroccans now expect to be considered inhabitants of the region and part of its social life.

In contrast to the 1980s, many Moroccan workers nowadays, even if undocumented, refuse to hide away as the dominant Spanish community expects them to. While Spaniards try to contain them in areas outside town--by not renting them flats and by expelling them from Spanish bars, for example (some bars have a notice on the door saying 'Forbidden to Foreigners')--they do not hesitate to gather in the streets after work or to socialise in bars owned by compatriots downtown. In doing so, they give their presence a certain public visibility. These everyday life practices may not be considered by all of them to be acts of resistance, but in the context, they are a point of tension with many Spaniards, as these practices declare to all the presence in the region of a large contingent of people from the Maghreb. Indeed, during the last twenty years, undocumented migrants have been tolerated in the province--because they were playing a crucial role in its economic development--on the condition of discretion and social invisibility. It is this tacit agreement that is being called into question today by Moroccans, many of whom settle fully in Andalusia.

More actively, some Moroccans, in spite of their illegal situation, are getting involved in local public life, responding favourably to the invitations of Spanish NGOs and trade unions. The latter realised the importance of such a reserve of cheap labour in the region and understood that, if they wanted to sustain the local working class, they had to take into account and denounce the working conditions imposed on foreign workers. Meanwhile, organisations more preoccupied with racism also wished to enrol these disaffected migrants. For a long time, these invitations fell on deaf ears, but some extreme cases--injured workers thrown out onto the street because they could not work anymore, or people victimised by physical racist violence--led a few migrants to contact these organisations. The friendship they encountered and the support they received encouraged others to join when they encountered difficulties

with their bosses. So, at the end of the 1990s, some Moroccans, first legal workers and then even undocumented ones, became union members or sympathisers. Thanks to these structures, and with the support of Spaniards, these Moroccans gave voice to their social demands. Benefiting from legal support, they were able to claim their rights and make use of medical assistance or the Spanish justice system.

In 1999, unexpectedly, a few hundred Moroccan workers demonstrated in the streets of Campo Hermoso (near El Ejido) to protest acts of racism. Though they were very few relative to the number of Moroccans working in the region, this was the first time migrants were acting publicly. On this occasion, they abandoned their usual submissive attitudes to show to the Spanish population that even if they were not full citizens, they were full persons, with demands and expectations. They asked for more respect from their employers but also from the Spanish population itself, demanding rights as basic as the right to walk in public space at any hour (usually, any African or Moroccan in the streets during working hours is arrested by the police), the right to enter any shop or bar without suffering discrimination, or the right to lodge a complaint against an employer (since the police most often refuse to register it). Not surprisingly, their demands were not met by local authorities or farmers, but it was a little revolution: before this incident nobody would have thought they were capable of such a collective action.

In the same period, trade unions took a role in the political debate on foreign workers and were mobilised when the new immigration law was publicly discussed in 1999. As the quotas of legal migrants were being decided between Spain and Morocco, the unions drew attention to illegal migrants and claimed rights for them. By this action, Moroccan migrants, in spite of the fact that only a small minority of them were activists, became the centre of a national debate in Spanish public life. This situation irritated Spanish farmers, since it was the presence of a population without any rights and totally ignored by the Spanish population that guaranteed the exploitation of these workers.

As Burgess and Park mentioned in their 'cycle of racial relations' (Burgess & Park 1921), it is through conflict that these migrants were gaining social acknowledgment of their existence in Spain. In this second phase, the majority of Moroccan workers did not fit the model of a 'transnational community' anymore, but seemed instead to be in a process of settlement in the country. What is meant here when we speak of 'settling' does not imply a matter of time but depends rather on the way migrants regard their own presence in the region. Through the activity of the most vindictive actors, it became clear to everybody that Moroccans were moving socially to a new position. More than a cheap and invisible labour force, they increasingly expected to achieve a symbolic and material place in the area.

This is the key to understanding what occurred in El Ejido in February 2000.

Migrant claims did not fit with the economic role offered to this population and, through racist violence, Spanish demonstrators made it clear to Moroccans that they were not willing to accept them if they refused to keep their traditional place: that of very discreet and vulnerable workers. El Ejido's mayor was quite clear on this point when he declared that 'NGOs bear all the blame [for the racist demonstrations], since they taught immigrants their rights' (J. Encisco cited in *Diario 16*, 11 Feb. 2000). It is the evolution of their social status that was the target here. Spanish demonstrators were asking Moroccan migrants to return to their previous attitude of total submission. Responding to this demand, Moroccan workers, documented and undocumented, intended to show their economic power and collective solidarity by going out on strike. At stake was the new social place they intended to occupy, low on

the social scale but at least recognised and respected.

It is clear that these events did not result suddenly from one particular event--even though a tragic one--such as the murder of a Spanish girl by a Moroccan. Rather we must make sense of them in a longer process of settlement from the earliest immigrant workers in the province onwards. The racism expressed by Spanish farmers towards Moroccans has its own logic in this process: it orders a certain hierarchy between social groups. This explains why Moroccans were not joined, during the strike, by migrants of other nationalities. The latter have different immigration histories in the area and, while they do share similar working conditions, they do not share the same social relation to the place.

Rumanians--Unsettled and Anchored in Mobility

After Moroccans, Rumanians appear to be the second largest group of foreign workers in Almeria, though we must be careful with our estimates because a large majority of these workers are undocumented. Migrants from Romania are of diverse social backgrounds: some come from collective farms in the south of Romania, which have partially collapsed since the end of Ceausescu's dictatorship in 1991, but there are also people from towns, relatively educated, who see work in Spain as an opportunity to improve their living conditions in Romania. For example, during my fieldwork I met a doctor from Rosiori (a town on the Danube plain) working with her two daughters in the greenhouses. Different generations are represented, but two groups predominate: young people between twenty and thirty years old without dependants, and older people with adult children. Though their social backgrounds are diverse, many hail from the same region of Romania, the department of Teleorman, as they use their social networks to facilitate their migrations.

Rumanians are the main competitors with Moroccans for jobs, and in the context of racism described above, they appear to be the employers' favourite foreign workers nowadays. The first Rumanians to be hired arrived in the mid 1990s, and the group grew very rapidly. Again, their undocumented status makes estimates approximate, but during the high season in 2005 there were probably between seven and ten thousand in the province of Almeria (still a minority compared with Moroccans, of whom there are believed to be between twenty and twenty-five thousand). During the events of 2000, Rumanians were far less numerous, no more than a few thousand, but they represented a point of crystallisation for the attention of external observers, such as journalists, because they played a crucial role in the reorganisation of foreign labour in the Almeria province.

Parallel to the steady arrival of Moroccans, the end of the century was marked by a diversification of foreign recruitment. Farmers enrolled people from South America, mainly Ecuador and Colombia, from sub-Saharan Africa, from the Philippines and from Eastern Europe. Obviously, this turn to new sources of recruitment was not due to a lack of potential Moroccan workers but can be understood as an answer to the reluctance Moroccans were showing during the same period towards being submissive. In such a situation, Rumanians are particularly appreciated, for the attitude they present is just the reverse of the Moroccans'. This characteristic is due not only to the fact that they are more compliant because they are in an earlier phase of migration, like Moroccans in the 1980s, but they also regard their presence in Spain in a different way.

Until the year 2000, Rumanian workers played the game of invisibility expected from this kind of labour force perfectly: with the exception of their employers, nobody had noticed their presence in the area. This is why the newspapers later wrote that Rumanians had been sent from their country to Andalusia for the purpose of

breaking the Moroccans' strike. Their appearance is probably partly responsible for the success of this discretion: being white-skinned and dressed like the Spaniards, they can walk through the streets without being spotted as foreigners. The presence of a large proportion of women (around 30 percent) also tends to make this group less suspect to the local population: these migrants do not congregate in 'worrisome' male groups in public spaces. During interviews, Spaniards often postulated that Rumanians did not need to assimilate, as they were already close to the Spanish population in many ways, culturally as well as morally. Of course, we know from inter-ethnic research that closeness and cultural differences between groups do not rely on any essential characteristic but depend on the situation and the relations between groups (Barth 1969). Moreover, Rumanians are very circumspect about their presence because they do not want to be noticed by the local population. I suggest that this attitude is due mostly to the way they envisage their migration. This is how Iliena sees her situation:

You know, here, you cannot be integrated; Spaniards don't want foreigners to settle here, they just want us to work. But it fits what we want, we don't want to stay here, we don't care about Spain; we are here because we can work. If there are jobs here, we come here. We go where we can earn some money, here, in Castellón or in France, everywhere there is something to do... I have friends all over Europe and I go where it's good for me, for jobs... It is easy for us to find jobs, because we don't ask much, because what is a small wage for you or for a Spaniard is a big one for Rumania. (Iliena, interview in Balerna, 19 August 2000)

I have conducted parallel fieldwork in Spain, France and Great Britain on the same kind of Rumanian migration, and these different situations seem to propose a new model of migration, quite distant from either assimilation or transnationalism as Portes defines it. Rumanian migrants are not successors to a long tradition of international mobility: most of them started to move after the end of the Ceausescu dictatorship, not because they were marginal in their own country but because the 'transition' to capitalism had such a social cost that it pushed the middle classes into a state of poverty that had been unknown to them before. It is in reaction to this social disqualification that people of various social origins decide to go abroad to earn wages no longer available at home. But most of them have not emigrated properly--rather, they use the wealth differential between geographically close countries to improve their lifestyle at home, becoming international commuters. As in other Eastern European countries (Morokvasić 2004), many of them became petty traders at the beginning of the 1990s, selling cheap Rumanian goods abroad and importing any kind of foreign products. In a second period, this model of temporary migration has been extended to more distant lands and longer periods (Diminescu 2003). Visa regulations imposed by EU members until 2002 and the possibility to obtain--legally or on the black market--a tourist visa for up to three months has certainly encouraged these back-and-forth movements. Since 2002, this tendency has been reinforced as Rumanians no longer need visas to travel to the EU, but they are obliged to return to their home country every three months or they can have their passport withdrawn. It is thus much more attractive for this population to commute than to settle in a place abroad. Unlike Moroccans who, after taking high risks to reach the Spanish coast, intend to stay as long as they can on the other side of the Mediterranean, Rumanians are pushed, by institutional arrangements, towards a continuing mobility between places.

In such a context, Rumanian workers develop original practices that consist not

of reinforcing their presence in one territory but of accumulating places where they can find temporary jobs in social migrant networks. When a person discovers a new destination where foreign workers are welcome, she or he exploits it and will often tell a few friends about it. By doing so, the discoverer makes an appeal to compatriots who are connected, even if not directly, to his or her social network. Meanwhile, she or he might learn from compatriot migrants that an interesting work opportunity exists in another country and will then forsake the first destination for a new one.

Communication between migrants from the same area of origin is stimulated by frequent returns, as, in home cities or villages, migrants constitute something like a social group who do not hesitate to go out collectively, showing off their social success due to migration (Potot 2002). Thus, these migrants are more connected to a network of mobility in which several places are exploited at the same time, than anchored in a particular territory of immigrant arrival.

This is quite clear in Andalusia, where many Rumanian migrants explained that it was not their first destination of migration. Some of them had worked in Italy before, where they were employed in restaurants or hotels; others had worked in construction in France or Germany, and so forth. It emerged that these routes were dependent on connections and bridges they could rely on, a function of the people they knew all over Europe. Consequently, these people are not willing to struggle for their rights in one place: their mode of resistance is mobility. When a situation is worsening in one place, or if they simply find a better opportunity, they just keep moving to another niche (Waldinger 1994) already 'domesticated' by colleagues. In a situation of conflict they are more inclined to *exit* than to *voice*, as Hirschman would put it (Hirschman 1970). The costs of these movements, psychological and financial, are minimised by reliance on compatriots to find work and shelter. This does not mean that a strong sense of solidarity exists between all Rumanian migrants--arrangements are made only between persons who know each other or if somebody is recommended by a friend--but on a large scale, this kind of organisation appears to be a solid social background that favours international migration, at least throughout the EU. Of course, these observations should not lead us to suppose that not a single Rumanian will settle in the south of Spain, but only that there is little chance, for now, of seeing collective Rumanian action erupting, since the strength of the group comes more from its scattering than from its capacity to organise demonstrations.

Apart from the fact that they have not developed the same attachment to territory as Moroccans, another motivation led Rumanians not to join the latter's demonstrations. Their social proximity in Spain has clearly not developed into a resource of collective identification. It is important for Eastern Europeans not to appear to close to people from Africa, primarily because this is what their favourable position in the competition for jobs relies on. If they had voluntarily joined the protest, they would have lost their qualities in the employers' eyes, mainly their perceived reliability, and would then be relegated just like the others. This situation of competition for jobs sustaining racism resonates with Bourgois' description of racist tensions between recent and older immigrant in New York City (Bourgois, 2002). Yet the second reason, less pragmatic and more symbolic, appears to be essential in our case study. Rumanians, overwhelmingly, share the racist perceptions that many Spaniards have of Moroccans. In their representations, ethnic closeness is much more important than social or conjectural proximity. Indeed, they share some job conditions with Moroccans and are as such situated in the same place on the labour social scale. However, they see themselves as being much closer to Spaniards, sharing a Christian culture and expecting to live by the same standards. In doing so, they tend to

wholeheartedly make theirs the Spanish xenophobic representations of Moroccans. This attitude can be related to the strong racism existing in Romania toward Gypsies (Trandafoiu, 2003). Stereotypes are thus translated from one population to another, without taking into account the differences between both situations. Thus, Rumanian workers explained me, a fundamental distinction between them and Moroccans came from the fact that Moroccans were originally nomadic, while Rumanians were not. There is nothing in the Moroccans' background that supports such notions of a supposed Gypsy-like nomadic origin, and even Spaniards do not share this view. Another racist stereotype imported from Romania relies on the idea that Moroccans were afraid of water and avoided it. This attitude is usually attributed to Gypsies who, in the nineteenth century, were systematically expelled from sources of water in Romania as they were suspected to pollute them and who, as a consequence, took up the habit of camping far away from sources or rivers.

During my fieldwork, the harshest xenophobic talk did not come from Spaniards but from Rumanians. While Spanish racist enunciations would always be preceded by "I am not racist but...", Rumanians would never take this kind of precaution, speaking as if racism was a universal point of view. In such a context, joining Moroccans demonstrating against Spaniards and denouncing racism would not only have been meaningless, but being associated with them would even be depreciative with regard to their own identity. Rumanians thus preferred not to damage representations of themselves by sharing the Spanish position. This attitude places them in the camp of the white majority and, at the same time, gives them the opportunity to take up better jobs by replacing relegated Moroccans.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how racism appears as a practice of division not only between Spaniards and foreign workers but also between workers of various foreign origins. In this sense, it is quite clear that it is an important element of the management of manpower (De Rudder, Poiret et Vourc'h, 2000). Origin being a factor of division, it reinforces the atmosphere of competition between workers and militates against any general collective action. Solidarity or even identification along class lines, common to all farm workers, cannot emerge as long as these ethnic identities remain stronger. With each group of origin intending to promote its own position, it seems that these differentiations are not likely to disappear. Moreover, this organisation around group identities is exacerbated by the employers' attribution of specific qualities to each group and by their ranking on scales of values.

Coming from different backgrounds, each migrant group then develops its own view of its role and prospects in the area. For Moroccans, even more than better job conditions, a key issue is to obtain social acknowledgement and to be accepted as being part of the local population. Meanwhile, Rumanians are not so much attached to territory and could leave the place rapidly if the atmosphere became harsher for them. Thus, it is clear that the social action of the workers does not depend on objective conditions of labour but more on social representations and on resources available. The core question, for these economic migrants, is to maintain a positive self identification, in spite of their lowly role in the labour market. For Moroccans, who are more involved in a process of settlement, this search of respectability passes through a struggle for their rights and against racist representations. For Rumanians, their way of resisting social depreciation due to their migration is to align themselves symbolically with the dominant group, depreciating others. We can suppose they will keep this attitude as long as Spaniards privilege them. But if the situation was to change, for example if new migrants from elsewhere were to be favoured instead of

them, it is very improbable that they would be categorised with Moroccans. In such a situation, which is very likely to appear in a context of harsh competition for jobs, it is probable that Rumanians would leave for other places in Europe, making use of their particular relation to space, since their main resource consists not of a capacity of collective protest but of transnational networks.

References

- Allen, T. & Turton, D. 1996. 'Introduction: in search of cool ground' In: Allen T. (ed) *In search of cool ground*. London: UNRISD / J. Currey / Africa World Press. 1-22.
- Barth, F. 1969. *Ethnic groups and boundaries. The social organisation of culture difference*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Berlan, J.-P. 1986. 'Agriculture et migrations' *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales* 2:3, 9-32.
- Bourgois, P. 2002. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Burgess, E. & Park, R.E. 1921. *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Checa, F. (ed.) 1994. *Invernaderos y inmigrante. El problema de la adaptacion de un colectivo marginal*. Madrid: MAS.
- Checa, F. 1999. 'De la Andalucía de los emigrantes a la de los inmigrantes- Diez años para la reflexión' *Demofilo Revista de cultura tradicional de Andalucía* 29, 211-255.
- De Rudder, V., Poiret, C. & Vourc'h, F. 2000. *L'inégalité raciste. L'universalité républicaine à l'épreuve*, Paris : Presses Universitaires de France.
- Diminescu, D. (ed.) 2003. *Visibles mais peu nombreux. Les circulations migratoires roumaines*. Paris: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.
- 29
- European Civic Forum 2004. 'Rapport sur la situation actuelle à El Ejido et dans la province d'Almeria.'
- Galtung, J. 1969. 'Violence, Peace and Peace Research' *Journal of Peace Research* 6:3, 167-191.
- Hirschman, A.O. 1970. *Exit, voice, and loyalty: responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states*. Cambridge (Mass.); London: Harvard University Press: Distributed by Oxford University Press.
- Morokvasić, M. 2004. "'Settled in Mobility": Engendering post-wall migration in Europe' *Feminist Review* 77, 7-25.
- Portes, A. 1996. 'Global Villagers The Rise of Transnational Communities' *The American Prospect* 7:25.
- Potot, S. 2002. 'Les migrants transnationaux: une nouvelle figure sociale en Roumanie' *Revue d'Etudes Comparatives Est-Ouest* 33:1, 149-177.
- Sayad, A. 1977. 'Les trois âges de l'émigration algérienne en France' *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 15, 59-79.
- Trandafoiu, R. 2003. 'Racism and Symbolic Geography in Romania: The Ghettoisation of the Gypsies' *Global Built Environment Review*, 3:2, 6-12.
- Waldinger, R.D. 1994. 'The making of an immigrant niche' *International Migration Review* 8:1, 3-30.

Notes:

1. Small boat used by migrants to reach the Spanish coast illegally from Morocco.
02/04/2009 15/15
2. This evolution has been very well described by Sayad (1977) in the case of Algerian migrants in France.

30

3. Nicolae Ceausescu, president of the 'People's Republic of Romania' from 1965 to 1989.